

NUTRITION STANDARDS FOR FOODS

The CNS includes six categories of competitive foods: 1) Snacks; 2) Entrees (Sold Only A La Carte); 3) Non-entree Combination Foods; 4) Fruits and Vegetables; 5) Cooked Grains; and 6) Soups. To be allowed for sale to students, a competitive food item must meet **at least one** general standard and **all** nutrient standards for the specific food category to which it belongs (see pages 3-9).

All foods are evaluated for compliance with the CNS based on the amount of the food item **as served** including any **added accompaniments** such as butter, cream cheese, syrup, ketchup, mustard and salad dressing. Some food categories have exemptions for specific nutrient-rich food items that are naturally higher in fat (such as nuts and seeds) or sugars (such as dried fruit). These foods are listed in the “Exemptions” column of each food category.

Two categories of foods and beverages are not allowed regardless of whether their nutrient content meets the CNS or the state statute for beverages. These include **significantly fortified** products with the exception of naturally nutrient-rich foods fortified with nutrients at levels based on scientifically documented health needs (e.g., milk fortified with vitamins A and D), and products containing **nutrition supplements**, e.g., amino acids, extracts, herbs or other botanicals.

GENERAL STANDARDS	EXEMPTIONS
<p>The food item meets at least one of the following three criteria:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Whole Grain-rich (WGR) Foods: The food item is a grain product that: 1) contains at least 50 percent whole grains by weight or has a whole grain as the first ingredient*; 2) any remaining grain ingredients are enriched; and 3) any noncreditable grains, such as bran, germ and modified food starch, are less than two percent of the product formula. To comply with this limit, the combined total of all noncreditable grains cannot exceed 3.99 grams for groups A-G (baked goods) or 6.99 grams for groups H (cereal grains) and I (ready-to-eat breakfast cereals) of the USDA ounce equivalents chart. ** * If water is the first ingredient, the second ingredient must be a whole grain. ** For more information on the WGR requirements and noncreditable grains, see the CSDE’s handout, Criteria for Whole Grain-rich Foods. Food Groups: The food item has one of the following food groups as the first ingredient: fruits, vegetables, dairy or protein foods, e.g., meat, beans, poultry, seafood, eggs, nuts, seeds. If water is the first ingredient, the second ingredient must be a fruit, vegetable, whole grain, dairy or protein food. Combination Foods: The food item is a combination food that contains at least ¼ cup of fruit and/or vegetable. 	<p>The following foods are exempt from the general standards and all nutrient standards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fresh and frozen fruits and vegetables with no added ingredients except water. Canned fruits with no added ingredients except water or that are packed in 100 percent juice, extra light syrup or light syrup, all without added artificial sweeteners, nonnutritive sweeteners, sugar alcohols or fats (including chemically altered fat substitutes). Canned vegetables with no added ingredients except water or that contain no added ingredients except a small amount of sugar for processing purposes to maintain the quality and structure of the vegetable. <p>All other food products are not exempt, and must meet at least one of the general standards and all of the nutrient standards for the specific food category.</p>

SNACKS

This category includes snack foods such as chips, crackers, popcorn, rice cakes, hard pretzels, pita chips, snack mix, breakfast cereals (e.g., cold ready-to-eat cereals and cooked hot cereals such as oatmeal), trail mix, nuts and seeds, peanut butter and other nut butters, meat snacks (e.g., jerky and meat sticks), cookies, cereal bars, granola bars, bakery items (e.g., pastries, toaster pastries, muffins, waffles, pancakes, French toast, soft pretzels and rolls), frozen desserts, ice cream (including ice cream novelties), cheese, pudding, yogurt and smoothies made with low-fat yogurt and fruits/vegetables/100 percent juice.

These standards apply to the amount of the food item **as served**, including any added accompaniments such as butter, cream cheese, syrup, ketchup, mustard and salad dressing.



NUTRIENT STANDARDS

- ▶ **Calories:** No more than 200 calories as served including any added accompaniments.
- ▶ **Total Fat:** No more than 35 percent of calories as served including any added accompaniments. No chemically altered fat substitutes.
- ▶ **Saturated Fat:** Less than 10 percent of calories as served including any added accompaniments.
- ▶ **Trans Fat:** All products must be 100 percent trans fat free including any added accompaniments. Labels must indicate zero trans fat as served and the ingredients statement cannot contain any partially hydrogenated oils.
- ▶ **Sugars:** No more than 35 percent of total sugars by weight and 15 grams of total sugars as served including any added accompaniments. No artificial sweeteners, nonnutritive sweeteners or sugar alcohols.
 - **Smoothies (made with low-fat yogurt and fruits/vegetables/100 percent juice):** No more than 4 grams of total sugars per ounce. No artificial sweeteners, nonnutritive sweeteners or sugar alcohols. Portion size is limited to no more than 8 fluid ounces for elementary schools and 12 fluid ounces for middle and high schools.
 - **Yogurt and Pudding:** No more than 4 grams of total sugars per ounce. No artificial sweeteners, nonnutritive sweeteners or sugar alcohols.
- ▶ **Sodium:** No more than 200 milligrams as served including any added accompaniments.
- ▶ **Caffeine:** No caffeine, with the exception of trace amounts of naturally occurring caffeine-related substances.

EXEMPTIONS

Exemption 1 – Fat and Saturated Fat: The following foods are exempt from the fat and saturated fat standards but cannot contain chemically altered fat substitutes:

- low-fat or reduced fat 100 percent natural cheese (including part-skim mozzarella);
- nuts, seeds, and nut and seed butters; and
- products consisting of only dried fruit with nuts and/or seeds with no added sweeteners or fats (including chemically altered fat substitutes).

All other snack products are not exempt and must meet all nutrient standards. *The fat exemption does not apply to foods containing cheese, nuts, seeds, nut/seed butters and dried fruit as ingredients*, e.g., peanut butter cookies, pecan cookies, granola bars with nuts, cranberry walnut muffin, cheese crackers, cheese sauce, peanut butter crackers and sesame seed crackers. These foods must meet the fat and saturated fat standards for the “Snacks” category.

Exemption 2 – Sugars: The following foods are exempt from the standard for sugars:

- Products consisting of only dried fruit with nuts and/or seeds with no added sweeteners (including artificial sweeteners, nonnutritive sweeteners and sugar alcohols) or fats (including chemically altered fat substitutes).
- Frozen desserts containing only 100 percent juice and/or fruit and no added sweeteners including artificial sweeteners, nonnutritive sweeteners and sugar alcohols.

All other snack products are not exempt and must meet all nutrient standards.

ENTREES (SOLD ONLY A LA CARTE)

Entrees include three categories of main dish food items: 1) a combination food of **meat/meat alternate and WGR food**, e.g., breakfast egg sandwich on whole-wheat English muffin, turkey wrap on whole-wheat tortilla, pizza with WGR crust, hamburger on whole-grain bun and bean burrito with whole-corn tortilla; 2) a combination food of **vegetable/fruit and meat/meat alternate**, e.g., chef's salad with turkey, cheese and hard-boiled egg, fruit and cheese platter, yogurt and fruit parfait, school-made yogurt and fruit/vegetable smoothies, baked potato with chili and chicken vegetable stir-fry; and 3) a **meat/meat alternate alone** (e.g., sausage patty, hard-boiled egg, grilled chicken), excluding yogurt, cheese, nuts and seeds, nut and seed butters, and meat snacks, e.g., beef jerky and meat sticks. These foods must comply with the standards for the "Snacks" category (see page 3).

The entree standards apply ONLY to entree items that are sold only a la carte, i.e., entrees that are not part of a reimbursable meal. Entree items that are sold a la carte on the **same day** that they are planned and served as part of reimbursable school meals are exempt from all nutrient standards if they meet the criteria in exemption 1 below.



These standards apply to the amount of the entree **as served**, including any added accompaniments such as butter, cream cheese, ketchup, mustard and salad dressing.

NUTRIENT STANDARDS	EXEMPTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Calories: No more than 350 calories as served including any added accompaniments. ▶ Total Fat: No more than 35 percent of calories as served including any added accompaniments. No chemically altered fat substitutes. ▶ Saturated Fat: Less than 10 percent of calories as served including any added accompaniments. ▶ Trans Fat: All products must be 100 percent trans fat free including any added accompaniments. Labels must indicate zero trans fat as served and the ingredients statement cannot contain any partially hydrogenated oils. ▶ Sugars: No more than 35 percent of total sugars by weight and no more than 15 grams of total sugars as served including any added accompaniments. No artificial sweeteners, nonnutritive sweeteners or sugar alcohols. ▶ Sodium: No more than 480 milligrams as served including any added accompaniments. ▶ Caffeine: No caffeine, with the exception of trace amounts of naturally occurring caffeine-related substances. 	<p>Exemption 1 – Entrees as Part of Reimbursable Meals: Entree items that are sold a la carte on the same day that they are planned and served as part of reimbursable school meals are exempt from the standards if they are the same or smaller portion size as the NSLP and SBP; have the same accompaniments; meet the trans fat standard; and do not contain artificial sweeteners, nonnutritive sweeteners, sugar alcohols or chemically altered fat substitutes.</p> <p><i>This exemption applies ONLY to entree items that are sold a la carte on the same day that they are planned and sold as part of a reimbursable meal.</i> It does not apply to any other meal items that are also sold a la carte such as fruits, vegetables, soups, breads, rice and pasta. <i>All other non-entree meal items that are sold a la carte are not exempt and must meet all nutrient standards.</i> For example, french fries that are part of a reimbursable meal can only be sold a la carte if they comply with the standards for "Fruits and Vegetables" (see page 6). Muffins that are part of a reimbursable meal can only be sold a la carte if they comply with the standards for "Snacks" (see page 3).</p> <p>Exemption 2 – Fat: The following entrees are exempt from the fat standard but not the saturated fat or trans fat standards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seafood with no added fats (including chemically altered fat substitutes). <p>All other entrees are not exempt, and must meet all nutrient standards unless they meet exemption 1 above.</p>

NON-ENTREE COMBINATION FOODS

This category includes nutrient-rich combination foods that are not entrees, such as WGR vegetable egg rolls, carrot sticks with peanut butter and vegetables with hummus dip. Foods in this category either do not meet the main dish entree criteria or do not provide the minimum meal pattern requirements for meat/meat alternates and grains or meat/meat alternates alone.



Note: Products consisting of only dried fruit with nuts and/or seeds are evaluated under the “Snacks” category (see page 3).

These standards apply to the amount of the food item **as served**, including any added accompaniments such as butter, sour cream, ketchup, mustard and salad dressing.

NUTRIENT STANDARDS	EXEMPTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Calories: No more than 200 calories as served including any added accompaniments. ▶ Total Fat: No more than 35 percent of calories as served including any added accompaniments. No chemically altered fat substitutes. ▶ Saturated Fat: Less than 10 percent of calories as served including any added accompaniments. ▶ Trans Fat: All products must be 100 percent trans fat free including any added accompaniments. Labels must indicate zero trans fat as served and the ingredients statement cannot contain any partially hydrogenated oils. ▶ Sugars: No more than 35 percent of total sugars by weight including any added accompaniments. No artificial sweeteners, nonnutritive sweeteners or sugar alcohols. ▶ Sodium: No more than 200 milligrams as served including any added accompaniments. ▶ Caffeine: No caffeine, with the exception of trace amounts of naturally occurring caffeine-related substances. 	<p>None</p>

FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

This category includes fresh, frozen, canned and dried fruits (including fruit snacks that are 100 percent fruit) and vegetables. Products consisting of only dried fruit with nuts and/or seeds are evaluated under the “Snacks” category (see page 3).

These standards apply to the amount of the food item **as served**, including any added accompaniments such as butter, sour cream, ketchup, mustard and salad dressing.



NUTRIENT STANDARDS	EXEMPTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► Calories: No more than 200 calories as served including any added accompaniments. ► Total Fat: No more than 35 percent of calories as served including any added accompaniments. No chemically altered fat substitutes. ► Saturated Fat: Less than 10 percent of calories as served including any added accompaniments. ► Trans Fat: All products must be 100 percent trans fat free including any added accompaniments. Labels must indicate zero trans fat as served and the ingredients statement cannot contain any partially hydrogenated oils. ► Sugars: No more than 35 percent of total sugars by weight as served including any added accompaniments. No artificial sweeteners, nonnutritive sweeteners or sugar alcohols. ► Sodium: No more than 200 milligrams as served including any added accompaniments. ► Caffeine: No caffeine, with the exception of trace amounts of naturally occurring caffeine-related substances. 	<p>Exemption 1 – All Nutrient Standards: The following fruit and vegetable products are exempt from all nutrient standards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fresh and frozen fruits and vegetables with no added ingredients except water. • Canned fruits with no added ingredients except water or that are packed in 100 percent juice, extra light syrup or light syrup, all without added artificial sweeteners, nonnutritive sweeteners or sugar alcohols and no added fats (including chemically altered fat substitutes). • Canned vegetables with no added ingredients except water or that contain no added ingredients except a small amount of sugar for processing purposes to maintain the quality and structure of the vegetable. <p>All other fruit and vegetable products are not exempt and must meet all nutrient standards.</p> <p>Exemption 2 – Sugars: The following fruit and vegetable products are exempt from the standard for sugars:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dried whole fruits or vegetables, dried whole fruit or vegetable pieces and dehydrated fruits or vegetables, all without added sweeteners (including artificial sweeteners, nonnutritive sweeteners and sugar alcohols). <p>All other fruit and vegetable products are not exempt, and must meet all nutrient standards unless they meet exemption 1 above.</p>

COOKED GRAINS

This category includes all cooked grains such as rice, pasta and quinoa except for cooked breakfast cereals like oatmeal, which are in the “Snacks” category (see page 3).

These standards apply to the amount of the food item **as served**, including any added accompaniments such as butter, oil, mayonnaise, ketchup, mustard and salad dressing.



NUTRIENT STANDARDS	EXEMPTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Whole Grain-rich: Cooked grains must be WGR, i.e., the product 1) contains at least 50 percent whole grains by weight or has a whole grain as the first ingredient*; 2) any remaining grain ingredients are enriched; and 3) the combined total of any noncreditable grains are less than two percent of the product formula, i.e., cannot exceed 6.99 grams. ** <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * If water is the first ingredient, the second ingredient must be a whole grain. ** For more information on the WGR requirements and noncreditable grains, see the CSDE’s handout, Criteria for Whole Grain-rich Foods. ▶ Calories: No more than 200 calories as served including any added accompaniments. ▶ Total Fat: No more than 35 percent of calories as served including any added accompaniments. No chemically altered fat substitutes. ▶ Saturated Fat: Less than 10 percent of calories as served including any added accompaniments. ▶ Trans Fat: All products must be 100 percent trans fat free including any added accompaniments. Labels must indicate zero trans fat as served and the ingredients statement cannot contain any partially hydrogenated oils. ▶ Sugars: No more than 35 percent of total sugars by weight and no more than 15 grams of total sugars as served including any added accompaniments. ▶ Sodium: No more than 200 milligrams as served including any added accompaniments. ▶ Caffeine: No caffeine, with the exception of trace amounts of naturally occurring caffeine-related substances. 	<p style="text-align: center;">None</p>

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SOUPS

This category includes all soups including ready-to-serve, canned, frozen and rehydrated.

These standards apply to the amount of the food item as **served**, including any added accompaniments such as sour cream, grated cheese or croutons.



NUTRIENT STANDARDS	EXEMPTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Calories: No more than 200 calories as served including any added accompaniments. ▶ Total Fat: No more than 35 percent of calories as served including any added accompaniments. No chemically altered fat substitutes. ▶ Saturated Fat: Less than 10 percent of calories as served including any added accompaniments. ▶ Trans Fat: All products must be 100 percent trans fat free including any added accompaniments. Labels must indicate zero trans fat as served and the ingredients statement cannot contain any partially hydrogenated oils. ▶ Sugars: No more than 35 percent of total sugars by weight and no more than 15 grams of total sugars as served including any added accompaniments. ▶ Sodium: No more than 200 milligrams as served including any added accompaniments. ▶ Caffeine: No caffeine, with the exception of trace amounts of naturally occurring caffeine-related substances. 	<p style="text-align: center;">None</p>

DEFINITIONS

a la carte sales: Foods and beverages that are sold separately from reimbursable meals in the USDA school nutrition programs. Also known as “competitive foods.”

artificial sweeteners: Ingredients with few or no calories used as sugar substitutes to sweeten foods and beverages. Common artificial sweeteners include acesulfame potassium (Acesulfame-K), aspartame (Nutrasweet, Equal), neotame, saccharin, sucralose (Splenda) and tagatose. These nonnutritive sweeteners are calorie-free except for aspartame, which is very low in calories.

chemically altered fat substitutes: Compounds made by chemically manipulating food products to mimic the texture and flavor of fat while providing fewer calories and less metabolizable fat, e.g., Olestra, Olean and Simplesse.

combination foods: Products that contain two or more components representing two or more of the recommended food groups: fruit, vegetable, dairy, protein or grains. Many combination foods also meet the definition for “entree items,” e.g., pizza, lasagna and hamburger on a whole-grain bun. Some combination foods are not entree items as defined by the CNS, such as a yogurt and fruit parfait.

competitive foods: Any foods and beverages that are available for sale to students anytime on school premises, other than meals served through the USDA school meal programs. Competitive food sales include, but are not limited to, cafeteria a la carte sales, vending machines, school stores and fundraisers. Sales of competitive foods include any activity during which currency, tokens, tickets or similar items are exchanged for foods or beverages.

entree items: A food item that is one of the following three categories of main dish food items: 1) a combination food of *meat/meat alternate and WGR food*, e.g., breakfast egg sandwich on whole-wheat English muffin, turkey wrap on whole-wheat tortilla, pizza with WGR crust, hamburger on whole-grain bun and bean burrito with whole corn tortilla; 2) a combination food of *vegetable/fruit and meat/meat alternate*, e.g., chef’s salad with turkey, cheese and egg, fruit and cheese platter, yogurt and fruit parfaits, school-made yogurt and fruit smoothies, baked potato with chili, and chicken vegetable stir-fry; and 3) a *meat/meat alternate alone* (e.g., sausage patty, egg, grilled chicken), excluding yogurt, low-fat or reduced fat cheese, nuts, seeds, nut/seed butters and meat snacks, e.g., jerky and meat sticks.

nonnutritive sweeteners: Ingredients with no calories used to sweeten foods and beverages. Nonnutritive sweeteners include artificial sweeteners such as acesulfame-potassium, neotame, saccharin and sucralose and “natural” sweeteners such as stevia, e.g., Rebiana, Rebaudioside A, Truvia, PureVia and SweetLeaf.

portion size: The amount of the item as packaged or served. The individual serving size or package cannot exceed 480 calories for entrees or 200 calories for all other foods.

reimbursable school meal: A meal that meets the meal pattern requirements of the USDA’s National School Lunch Program (NSLP) or School Breakfast Program (SBP).

school day: the period from midnight before to 30 minutes after the end of the official school day.

school premises: All areas of the property under the jurisdiction of the local or regional board of education, the regional vocational-technical school system or the governing authority district or school.

sugar alcohols (polyols): A type of carbohydrate used as a sugar substitute to sweeten foods and beverages. Sugar alcohols are incompletely absorbed and metabolized by the body and contribute fewer calories than most sugars. They also perform other functions such as adding bulk and texture to foods. Common sugar alcohols include sorbitol, mannitol, xylitol, maltitol, maltitol syrup, lactitol, erythritol, isomalt and hydrogenated starch hydrolysates (HSH). Products with sugar alcohols are often labeled “sugar free.”

total sugars: All sources of sugars including naturally occurring (e.g., fruits, vegetables and milk) and added (e.g., brown sugar, corn sweetener, corn syrup, dextrose, fructose, glucose, high fructose corn syrup, honey, invert sugar, lactose, malt syrup, maltose, molasses, raw sugar, sucrose, sugar and syrup).

For more definitions, see the glossary in the CSDE’s [Connecticut Nutrition Standards for Foods in Schools](#).

BETTER CHOICE RECOMMENDATIONS

The Better Choice Recommendations are additional recommendations beyond the CNS requirements, listed in the green and white columns on the right of the CSDE's [List of Acceptable Foods and Beverages](#). They are not required, but help schools to identify foods that are even better choices. Foods that meet these recommendations are often less processed and more nutrient-rich. The Better Choice Recommendations vary for each food category, but generally include no artificial flavors or colors; no high fructose corn syrup; at least 2.5 grams of fiber (a "good" source of fiber as defined by the Food and Drug Administration); and 100 percent whole grain (only for products containing grains). The CSDE strongly encourages schools to choose foods that meet these recommendations.

BEVERAGES

The requirements for beverages allowed for sale to students in public schools are separate from the CNS. The beverage requirements are defined by C.G.S. [Section 10-221q](#), and apply to all public schools, regardless of whether the district participates in HFC or the NSLP. Some state beverage requirements are stricter than the Smart Snacks beverage standards. Schools must follow whichever requirements are stricter. For more information on the beverage requirements, see the CSDE's [Beverage Requirements](#) Web page and the CSDE's [Guide to Competitive Foods in Schools](#).



RESOURCES

Beverage Requirements (CSDE Web page):

www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2626&q=322418

Connecticut Nutrition Standards (PowerPoint):

www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/deps/nutrition/hfc/cnspt.pdf

Guide to Competitive Foods in Schools:

www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/deps/nutrition/cf/cfg.pdf

Connecticut Nutrition Standards (CSDE Web page):

www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2626&q=322422

Criteria for Whole Grain-rich Foods:

<http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/deps/nutrition/nslp/crediting/wgrcriteria.pdf>

Healthy Food Certification (CSDE Web page):

www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2626&q=322420

List of Acceptable Foods and Beverages (CSDE Web page):

www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2626&q=322432



For more information, visit the CSDE's [HFC](#) and [CNS](#) Web pages or contact Susan S. Fiore, M.S., R.D., Nutrition Education Coordinator, Connecticut State Department of Education, Bureau of Health/Nutrition, Family Services and Adult Education, 25 Industrial Park Road, Middletown, CT 06457, 860-807-2075, susan.fiore@ct.gov.

This document is available at www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/deps/nutrition/hfc/summarycns2016.pdf.

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